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We Need Black August Now More Than Ever

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By [Joseph Edelin](#)

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In the face of an unprecedented attack on the teaching of a true and accurate portrayal of history in schools, spearheaded by those in the “anti-Critical Race Theory” movement (which is not really a thing, but I won’t get into that here), we who stand on the side of truth have a very important decision to make: a) allow it to happen or, b) fight like hell to stop it. Assuming option B is the only real option, in order for us to win this fight, our tactics must change; the traditional marching down the street holding signs with clever sayings isn’t going to cut it anymore. Fortunately, we are embarking on a month that can give us guidance and historical instruction on the best ways to properly confront this newest iteration of white supremacy. It’s called Black August, and many people have never heard of it.

Monifa Bandele, Chief Strategy Officer with [MomsRising](#), sums up Black August perfectly when she says that it is a time to “reflect and learn about the legacies of Black revolutionaries, while we rededicate ourselves to the protracted struggles against white supremacy, colonialism, capitalism, and imperialism. We study, plan, and pledge to continue the work and fight for Black liberation.” You might be thinking, as I did when I first heard about it, that Black August is a relatively new phenomena that emerged as a response to the 2020 murder of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor (still waiting on those convictions BTW). Actually, Black August has been in existence since 1979, and has been practiced by dedicated communities all across the country.

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capitalism, and imperialism. We study, plan, and pledge to continue the work and fight for Black liberation."

- Monifa Bandele

The birth of Black August was both intentional and organic, brought to life by incarcerated members of the Black power organization, the Black Guerilla Family, in San Quentin State Prison in August of 1979, following the killing of their founder and leader, George Jackson. Originally, Black August was used as time to reflect on, and honor the lives of incarcerated Black activists. Practitioners would celebrate during the month by studying revolutionary texts, fasting, exercising, and abstaining from drugs, alcohol, and mainstream media. Over time, the celebration has expanded to not only studying and bringing awareness to works by revolutionary authors, but to also engage in activism on behalf of incarcerated Black political prisoners and oppressed Black people around the world.

Black August is just the latest in a long line of important events concerning the struggle for the liberation of Black people. The Haitian Revolution began in August of 1791, Nat Turner's rebellion occurred in August of 1831, the March on Washington took place in August of 1963, and the Watts rebellion took place in August of 1965. Additionally, a myriad of Black activists and leaders such as James Baldwin, Marcus Garvey, Anna Julia Cooper, Fred Hampton, and Marsha P. Johnson were also born in August.

August is also the month when hundreds of schools throughout the country begin their school year. Wouldn't it be amazing if, in addition to teaching students the classroom expectations and procedures (please, still do that, you're setting yourself up for failure if you don't), students also got to start their year off by reading quotes and texts from Malcolm X, Marcus Garvey, or Angela Davis, and engaging in dialogue about prison reform, food deserts, and the Black maternal health crisis? The education of our young people toward, what master educator Gloria Ladson-Billings calls, a

"critical consciousness" is not just a necessity, but is our responsibility if we ever hope to see the dismantling of this oppressive system in which we currently exist. Brazilian educator Paulo Freire tells us that "there is no such thing as a neutral educational process. Education either functions as an instrument that is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, or it becomes 'the practice of freedom,' the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of the world."

Just as the early practitioners of Black August in San Quentin State Prison faced reprisals from prison guards, we know that in today's educational climate, teachers across the country are being targeted by watchdog groups and state school boards for teaching the truth to their students about the facts surrounding this country and its inception. But what better way to teach about revolutionaries than by being a revolutionary! Students look to us, their teachers, mentors, and role models for guidance on how they should engage with the world around them. **Now is not the time to shrink in the face of oppression, but to stand tall on the shoulders of our ancestors who have paved the way for our liberation.**

This video from the [Freedom Archives](#) includes interviews with George Jackson, Georgia Jackson (George and Jonathan Jackson's mother) and Angela Davis.

Nelson Mandela once said, "education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world." I would take it one step further, and say that a revolutionary education is the weapon that we need right now, one that is rooted in the spirit of Fred Hampton, Malcolm X, Assata Shakur, Fannie Lou Hamer, and Queen Yaa Asantewaa. As the state of our world seems to deteriorate with every new news cycle, what better time to use Black August as an entry point for teachers and students alike to engage in dialogue and practices focused on changing the conditions in their community and the larger world around them. The time to act is now, we can wait no longer because as George Jackson said, "patience has its limits. Take it too far, and it's cowardice."

Happy Black August!

"We can't afford to be spectators while our lives deteriorate. We have to truly love our people and work to make that love stronger."

— [Assata Shakur](#)

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